

**TESTIMONY OF DARLENE McCORD**  
**UNITED STATES SENATE**  
**COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION**  
**AIRLINE PASSENGER FAIRNESS ACT (S. 383)**

My husband and I recently planned a vacation in the Grand Caymans. We were scheduled to fly from Reno to Denver, Denver to Houston and then on to the Grand Caymans. The carrier was United Airlines.

My testimony will outline how United Airlines totally abandoned us. What is a passenger to do when the airline totally turns its back on an international traveler that, through no fault of their own has missed all connections, and in the end lost all of their luggage? Luggage that the airlines value, and want to replace, at prices established in 1929. Six hundred and forty dollars for a bag full of clothes. Would you or your spouse travel to a resort hotel where the room rate is over six hundred dollars a night with six hundred dollars worth of clothes? Since the airlines made us check our luggage and we could not carry our valuables on, there needs to be more responsibility on their part when it comes to lost or stolen luggage.

I am a very experienced traveler, yet with all of my knowledge of the system, United Airlines was able to make it impossible for me to get any help, get our records or even find a single person, all the way up the ladder, to the corporate offices in Libertyville, to help us. In fact, the customer service agent in Los Angeles made me call him Mr. Johnson (the emphasis on Mr.)

If you show any anger or frustration over your plight, the United representatives tell you that they don't have to help you and that if you don't treat them right they will hang up. They have unlimited power over passengers and clearly management lets their employees practice this awful form of abuse. Passengers at this time have no rights. There is something very wrong with the system.

Our vacation, "turned nightmare", was ended within a couple of days and we returned home with over ten thousand dollars in actual losses. Now the airlines wants us to provide them with receipts for all of our clothing over one hundred dollars. Do you keep receipts for every item of clothing that you intend to pack into a suitcase and entrust to the airlines?

The abuse starts all over again when you attempt to get your six hundred and forty dollars. There is no "I'm sorry" letter. Instead you get a list of demands and if you are not compliant with the demands within thirty days, sorry they won't help. Don't have receipts? Sorry, you lose.

**What happened on our way to the Cayman Islands?**

DELAY ONE

In Denver our United flight was delayed due to a mechanical problem. Delays happen, it is what the airline does that makes all the difference. At this critical point United Airlines abandoned us. They demonstrated a complete lack of concern and things only got worse.

I waited for twenty minutes in line watching one customer after another become outraged by the lack of service. The overwhelming feeling of each passenger, waiting in the long line, was that not a single United "customer service" employee cared.

After waiting twenty minutes, my request for help was summarily met with, "There is nothing we can do."

I then went back to the gate and begged for help. I asked them for two things; have an agent meet us at the gate and let our connecting flight know we were coming. They promised that an agent would be at the gate to assist us. It was going to be a very close connection and we needed the promised help.

## DELAY TWO

United said that our second plane was being delayed for three broken seats. Once we boarded, the seats were just taped off. No reason for the additional delay. This caused another twenty-thirty minute delay.

## DELAY THREE

The pilot said we were waiting for luggage to be loaded and he was sure we all wanted to travel with our luggage. In fact, they started boarding mail and the baggage handler put on a show for all of us. He was angry that he was doing the work alone. He put one package on the transport and then held his back. Ten to fifteen minutes later the job was done.

The delay was now over forty minutes and we could only hope that United would make good on its promise to have an agent at the gate to help passengers make their connection.

Upon our arrival, not only were we not greeted by an agent, there were no United employees anywhere in the entire boarding area.

## TRY TO MAKE CONNECTION

We started running through the airport as fast as we could. Our connection was four terminals away. We arrived at the gate eight minutes prior to departure only to be refused entry to the plane. We were flying United to United (operated by Cayman Airlines) with boarding passes. The agent (Sarah) would not let us board.

## THE AIRLINE STRIKE

What we were to find out was that the airline pilots had gone on strike and that the gate agent exercised a rule that if a passenger was not on board when she elected to close the gate,

they would miss the flight. The strike was on.

We were never told of the strike. We could not understand why we were not allowed to board and no one would tell us that we got caught in a strike until more than 24 hours later. United had to know and they still offered no help.

The employees of United and Cayman Airlines were taking their labor dispute out on us.

## TRYING TO GET TO OUR DESTINATION

We went back to the United counter (four terminals away) and started the process of determining how we would get to the Cayman Islands. Since Cayman Airlines only had one evening flight out, three days a week, United said we could wait twenty-four hours in Houston for the next flight (still not telling us that the airline was on strike and that there was no way we could travel on Cayman Airlines for over a week). We said, "No." We were then routed to Miami. United would not help us with hotel reservations and they didn't even provide a toothbrush.

We were told a United agent would meet us at the gate to help us. We knew that there would be no one at the gate, and we were right.

So, there we were in Miami on Super Bowl weekend without any help and no hotel reservations. We used our own means to get a reservation. This process took us four hours and the hotel we got was not very good. Since we had no toiletries, we had a bellman go to a service station to buy us a few things.

## GETTING OUT OF MIAMI

United Airlines, with their partner Cayman Airlines, provided no help in Miami. United knew of the strike and they once again left us stranded. We took it upon ourselves to go to American Airlines and arrange for a flight to the Caymans.

## LUGGAGE

When we arrived our luggage was not there as had been promised by United. So we started the process of filling out forms with American Airlines because it is the responsibility of the last carrier to locate luggage, without regard to fault.

We were assured that our luggage would arrive. We told the airline that we knew that our luggage was being held at Cayman Airlines (part of the labor dispute), and that we feared that the Houston manager of Cayman Airlines might cause a permanent loss of the luggage.

After two days with no luggage and spending all of our time trying to get some clothes and locate luggage, we had decided it was time to go home.

## GETTING HOME

Trying to get help from United was the final insult. By this time, I was going to go up the management ladder until someone would help. Twenty minutes later, my call had been transferred to Los Angeles. The “customer service” manager could not have been more indifferent. I was allowed to call him Mr. Johnson, with the emphasis on Mr. He finally agreed to let us come home. He said that he would provide American Airlines with an electronic endorsement that would let them accept our Cayman Airlines ticket. We were told to be at the airport two hours early to get all of the paperwork completed.

We arrived at the airport two hours early and United Airlines once again had failed to keep their word. There was no electronic endorsement waiting and we had to pay the highest possible rate to get off the island.

When I called United Airlines upon arrival in Florida to ask what happened, they said that our record showed that they had agreed to the electronic endorsement and that they were sorry that it didn’t get to American.

At this point, I called the highest customer service person available to me. The Libertyville office could not of been more indifferent. When I asked for a copy of my record, I was told to get an attorney if I wanted the records because they would not be released without a subpoena.

## THE LEGAL PROCESS

We arrived home with no luggage. Even though we told the airlines that we had good reason to believe that the managing agent at Cayman Airlines was responsible for the disappearance, it didn’t help.

By this time the search for our luggage had ended. There is no record of our luggage past its arrival at Cayman Airlines.

Our attorney tried to get our records from United Airlines. He was refereed to Prentice-Hall, United’s resident agent in Nevada. They advised our attorney that if he issued a subpoena for the records that they will just forward the subpoena to United. The airline will not release records and no one appears to know how soon our records will be removed from the system and then destroyed with no record of events.

American Airlines has told us that the luggage is lost and that they will be sending us claim forms. We have lost nearly ten thousand dollars and they want to give us twelve hundred dollars to cover the loss. We have attached our records for your review.

## LEGISLATIVE HELP

There is no place that passengers can go to get help when they are abandoned by the airlines. We have no idea what the outcome of our “vacation trip” will be. One thing is for sure,

the airlines have no regard for passengers and they obviously will not improve unless forced to.